

New Jersey Attorney General's Office

Division of Criminal Justice

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News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Oct. 16, 2003

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DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE - CASINO PROSECUTIONS BUREAU CHARGES NY BUSINESSMAN WITH MULTI-MILLION \$\$\$ CASINO SCAM

\$1.6 Million Dollar Gambling Loss Led To Discovery Of Fraudulent Scheme

TRENTON - Attorney General Peter C. Harvey and Vaughn L. McKoy, Director, Division of Criminal Justice, announced that the Division of Criminal Justice - Casino Prosecution Bureau has charged a Queens, New York, businessman with using millions of dollars in fraudulent bank checks to gamble at an Atlantic City casino.

Attorney General Harvey noted that the Casino Prosecution Bureau, in conjunction with the Division of Gaming Enforcement, continues to target fraud and illegal activities that impact the casino industry. "The Attorney General's Office is committed to aggressively pursuing casino-related crime by investigating and prosecuting anyone who would attempt to manipulate financial instruments to illegally gamble in New Jersey casinos."

According to Criminal Justice Director McKoy, the Casino Prosecutions Bureau obtained a State Grand Jury indictment which charged Anastasios Samaras, 44, Astoria, Queens, NY, with first degree conspiracy to commit money laundering and related offenses, financial facilitation of criminal activity (1st degree), theft by deception (2nd degree), and bad checks (2nd degree). If convicted on all charges, Samaras faces up to 60 years in state prison and fines/penalties up to \$700,000. Samaras was arrested by the New Jersey State Police assigned to the Division of Gaming Enforcement on April 4. Samaras posted \$250,000 cash bail via a bond after his arrest. Samaras will be required to appear in Atlantic County Superior court for arraignment.

"This indictment alleges that the defendant established an elaborate scheme which allowed him to place significant monies on deposit with an Atlantic City casino and to literally gamble for free," McKoy said. "The scheme collapsed when the losses exceeded the value of the deposited monies and the checks were determined to be worthless."

Thomas N. Auriemma, Director, Division of Gaming Enforcement, emphasized that large or unusual financial transactions between a patron and a casino are always subject to government scrutiny and warned that criminals should think twice before attempting any illegal activity at an Atlantic City casino.

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The State Grand Jury indictment alleges that on 21 occasions between Sept. 27, 2002 and Jan. 7, 2003, Samaras, the owner of New Horizons, a Queens, NY, construction company, deposited seven different \$1 million checks with the Hilton Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. The deposited funds were used as “front” money to gamble at the casino. The checks were issued by Interbank of New York through the Astoria, Queens, branch. An “official check” is issued as a bank service after a customer fills out an application and either writes a check on an approved account or has the amount debited directly from the account. The “official check” is equivalent to cash.

The investigation determined that Hilton employees followed appropriate procedures to validate the issuance and legitimacy of the checks by contacting Interbank (Astoria branch) officials who verified the authenticity of the checks. Subsequent investigation determined that Vasiliki “Bessy” Mandelos, 35, Whitestone, NY, Astoria Branch Manager, Interbank of New York and Vasiliki “Kiki” Vasiadis, 34, East Elmhurst, NY, Operations Supervisor, Astoria Branch, Interbank of New York, participated in the fraudulent scheme by producing the fraudulent checks and concealing the use of the checks by Samaras. Additionally, it was determined that Mandelos and Vasiadis devised a process whereby they would verify the “legitimacy” of the deposited checks with Hilton casino personnel. As a result of the investigation, Mandelos pleaded guilty before Atlantic County Superior Court Judge Michael Donio on Sept. 15 to a charge of conspiracy. Vasiadis pled guilty to conspiracy before Judge Donio on Sept. 29. Mandelos is scheduled to be sentenced on Dec. 5, while Vasiadis is slated for sentencing on Dec. 12. Both individuals are cooperating with the Division of Criminal Justice prosecution.

It is alleged that at Samaras’ request, the Hilton agreed to “hold” the checks (Casino Control Commission regulations permit a hold period for up to five-days). Because of Samaras’ relative gaming success, he was able to repurchase the deposited checks after completing gaming activities and to return the fraudulent checks to either Mandelos or Vasiadis without the casino negotiating the instruments. However, it is alleged that on Jan. 6, Samaras lost \$1,687,000 at the Hilton gaming tables and was unable to retrieve the fraudulent check. The casino negotiated and deposited the check which was dishonored.

The investigation was conducted by New Jersey State Police detectives assigned to the Division of Gaming Enforcement. Additional investigative support was received from the New York State Department of Banking and the Hilton Hotel and Casino. Deputy Attorney General Yvonne Maher of the Division of Criminal Justice - Casino Prosecution Bureau presented the case to the State Grand Jury. The indictment was handed up to Mercer County Superior Court Judge Maria Marinari Sypek on Oct. 16. The case will be assigned to the Atlantic County Superior Court for trial.

An indictment is merely an accusation. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Additional information, including the State Grand Jury indictment, is available by logging on to the Division of Criminal Justice web page at www.njdcj.org.